



State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Shepard Building
255 Westminster Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903-3400

Deborah A. Gist
Commissioner

July 10, 2009

To: All Superintendents

From: Deborah A. Gist, Commissioner ~~2/11~~

Re: *Use of federal stabilization funds*

Thank you for your many responses to the introductory e-mail that I sent to as I began my service as Commissioner of Education. I have had a very exciting first week, during which I visited several school districts and was able to spend time with some of you. I appreciate the welcome I am looking forward to visiting every school district in the coming months.

As we prepare for the beginning of the next school year, we are fortunate that through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), Rhode Island will receive an additional \$78 million in Title I and IDEA funds during FY 2010. As you know, you must allocate these funds so as to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps, and I'm sure that you are committed to doing so. The funds must be used consistent with the statutory and regulatory requirements of Title I and IDEA.

Rhode Island districts will also receive approximately \$37 million in State Fiscal Stabilization Funds. Though these federal funds will offset a cut in FY 2010 state aid and will provide little or no increase in overall aid, you have committed to using these funds to advance education reform and to meet these four assurances:

- achieve equity in teacher distribution and improve teacher effectiveness;
- improve the collection and use of data;
- improve academic content standards and assessments; and
- support struggling schools.

As Commissioner, I must report to the U.S. Department of Education on our progress toward completing these four assurances. I am confident that you will be able to report that we are seeing results.

Rhode Island has made progress in improving its education system, yet we all can agree that we must do more to improve performance for all of our students. In particular, we must address the inequities contributing to our achievement gaps. These federal stimulus funds are an opportunity and mandate for doing so.

Use of Federal Stabilization Funds
Page 2

The RIDE Finance Office has been working closely with each of you regarding the allocation and use of these federal funds. In your application for these funds, you have assured Governor Carcieri that you would use these funds to meet the four assurances outlined above. As you know, you must account for the specific use in your district of these funds. I will closely monitor the use of these funds in every district to ensure that all districts are using their funds for the intended purpose.

We have posted information from RIDE and from the U.S. Department of Education regarding all of the ARRA funds for education on the RIDE Web site,
<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Finance/Funding/ARRA/>

As you make decisions regarding how to use these funds, I would like to draw your attention to "Smart Options: Investing the Recovery Funds for Student Success," by the Coalition for Student Achievement. This paper gives many good recommendations as to how districts (and states) can use these funds so as to best meet the four assurances. For example, to meet the assurance on teacher effectiveness, districts can:

- create fairer, more accurate, and more useful teacher evaluation systems, developed with teachers and their unions;
- reform their transfer and seniority policies; or
- revamp professional development.

The paper also cites several examples of current best practices that districts have already implemented to meet the four assurances, such as:

- expanding learning time in traditional public schools (Edwards Miele School, Boston) by expanding the learning day on Mondays through Thursdays;
- developing teacher leaders by extending selected teachers' contracts for additional days and hours through Leadership Development Grants (Fairfax County, Virginia); or
- attracting accomplished teachers to high-need schools through transfer bonuses (New York City).

You can access this paper, along with supplemental resources, at:
http://coalitionforstudentachievement.org/economic_rec.asp

Later this year, Rhode Island will apply for federal Race to the Top funds. If our application is successful, Rhode Island could receive more than \$100 million to improve public education. These funds would enable us to make dramatic progress toward advancing learning for all. In a series of speeches on Race to the Top funds, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has made it clear that the U.S. Department of Education will evaluate our progress toward completing the four assurances. That will be a vital factor in determining whether we receive Race to the Top funds.

*Use of Federal Stabilization Funds**Page 3*

If Rhode Island receives Race to the Top funds, we will put in place an application process for districts hoping to receive a share of these funds. Your application will include questions about how you have spent the stabilization money that you have received so as to meet the four assurances.

I know that you agree with me that our work must be driven by urgency for improvement and that we intend to be held accountable for results. I will continue to discuss this and other issues with the leadership and general membership of the Rhode Island School Superintendents' Association. I have also set aside time in my calendar for meetings with individual superintendents or groups of superintendents, during which we can discuss any topic that concerns you. Please feel free at any time to contact my Chief of Staff, Clark Greene, clark.greene@ride.ri.gov, to schedule a meeting.